Hell as "Eternal" Punishment? On the Depiction of Hell in Vīlhojī's Kathā Gyāncarī

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2018-0011

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Abstract: This paper engages with the literature of the Biśnoī Sampradāya, a religious tradition that emerged in the fifteenth century in Rajasthan and traces itself back to the Sant Jāmbhojī. The paper specifically examines a composition of the sixteenth-seventeenth century poet-saint and head of the tradition Vīlhojī. His *Kathā Gyāncarī* is a unique composition among the corpus of Biśnoi literature with regard to its genre, style and content. The text revolves around the consequences of one's actions after death, particularly punishment in hell. This paper aims to illustrate that the *Kathā Gyāncarī* depicts suffering in hell as the eternal consequence of committing sins or crimes, which is unique not only for Biśnoī literature, but for Sant literature in general. It argues that the depiction of hell as eternal punishment was used as a rhetorical strategy at a time the Biśnoī Sampradāya faced intense difficulties. In another vein, this depiction of hell could indicate the Biśnoīs' close connection to the Indian Shi'a community of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs. This is reflected not only in the *Kathā Gyāncarī*'s function of hell as a eternal punishment for disbelievers and sinners, but also in the soteriological role of the teacher or *guru* as well as in the appearance of various Nizārī figures and motives in the text. In either way picturing hell as eternal suffering serves to amplify the authority of the Biśnoī teachers and the supremacy of the Biśnoī religious doctrine.

Keywords: biśnoī sampradāya, sants, early modern literature, Rajasthan

1 Introduction

Depictions of hell can be traced throughout the Indian religious history and occur in texts pertaining to a wide spectrum of religious-philosophical traditions: From the twenty-one hells of the *Manusmṛti*,[1] which assign different

1 See Jacobsen 2009: 390 f. for a description of the hell(s) and their function according to the Manusmṛti.

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methods of torture to specific crimes, to the detailed description of the path towards hell as told in the "Pretakhaṇḍa" of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*[2]; from the visionary visits of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara to the hell Avīci[3] to Jain cosmographies that include several hells.[4] The mere possibility of the existence of places like hell and heaven might appear puzzling for such traditions, which endorse the theory of *karma* and believe in rebirth. Nevertheless, concepts of hell inform the texts of many different traditions in South Asia,[5] although they certainly differ in the ways in which the existence of hell or heaven is accommodated as well as the function that is attributed to them.

This paper examines the depiction of hell in one early-modern Sant tradition from Western Rajasthan, the so-called Biśnoī Sampradāya. It engages with the compositions of Vīlhojī, a sixteenth-seventeenth century poet-saint and head of the Biśnoī Sampradāya at the time. This paper aims to illustrate that Vīlhojī's *Kathā Gyāncarī* displays a unique depiction of hellish punishment as eternal suffering. It argues that this conception of hell serves to emphasize the supremacy of the Biśnoī religious doctrine as well as the authority of its religious leaders. At first I will give an introduction into the Biśnoī Sampradāya and the important place that is attributed to Vīlhojī within this tradition. I will thereafter analyze the structure and content of Vīlhojī's *Kathā Gyāncarī*. Subsequently, I will illustrate that the *Kathā Gyāncarī* employs a unique parallelism between abode in hell and final release from the cycle of rebirths, suggesting that suffering in hell is the eternal consequence of not adhering to the Biśnoī doctrine. In the following, this article argues that the depiction of hell as eternal punishment can be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy, which reflects a particular process in the development of the Biśnoī Sampradāya. Simultaneously, this might indicate the Biśnoīs' strong link to Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm a sub-division of Shi'a Islam. This article aims to demonstrate that in either way, the *Kathā Gyāncarī* issues threats of eternal condemnation to hell in order to amplify the authority of the Biśnoī teachers and the supremacy of the religious doctrine they enunciate.

2 See Abegg 1921 for a German translation of the "Pretakhaṇḍa" of the *Garuḍa Purāṇa*.

3 See Scherman 1892: 62 f.

4 See Dundas for an explication of the Jain cosmography, including the doctrine of *loka*, "the massive structure which contains the heavens and the hells, along with the system of island continents divided by mountain ranges and surrounded by oceans which lies at its center." See Dundas 2002: 90.

5 Depictions of hell can also be found in secular texts. They are, for instance, mentioned in land grants from as early as the fifth century CE. Here, condemnation to hell is portrayed as one consequence for seizing granted land. See Arya 2004: 156.

2 Vīlhojī and the Biśnoī Sampradāya

The Biśnoī Sampradaya evolved in fifteenth century Marwar (Western Rajasthan) and traces itself back to the poet-saint or Sant Jāmbhojī. According to tradition Jāmbhojī founded a community of followers in 1485 CE during a great drought in the region. The Biśnoī Sampradāya is, among others, notable for its complex religious framework. Ethnographic research and textual studies suggest that the Biśnoī Sampradāya might have originally been a dissection of the Gujarati branch of Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm a sub-division of the 7er Shi'a branch of Islam.[6] Moreover, the Biśnoī Sampradāya incorporated elements of different religious-philosophical traditions into its teaching, that are today considered to belong to Hinduism or Islam. For instance, it included textual and doctrinal elements of the yogic-tantric Nāth Sampradāya.[7] Apart from this, the tradition is usually depicted as belonging to the Sant traditions of *bhakti*, which propagate devotion to an abstract or formless god.[8] During much of their history Biśnoīs thus defied any categorization as being either "Hindus" or "Muslims", which is reflected in their early literature. In contrast to its beginnings, the Biśnoīs nowadays seek to represent themselves as proponents of a "pure" Vedic Hinduism and propagate a Hindu provenance of the community.[9]

The Biśnoī Sampradāya currently has about 1 million followers throughout Northwest India, though the majority of the Biśnoī communities is spread in the area around Jodhpur and Bikaner. Biśnoīs are today well known for their strict protection of animals and trees, in particular of the Khejrī tree and the black buck gazelle—two indigenous species in Marwar.[10] Members of the

6 For ethnographic research dealing with the presumed Nizārī Ismā'īlī origin of the Biśnoī Sampradāya, see Khan 2003a for textual evidence, see Kempe-Weber 2015.

7 See Kempe-Weber forthcoming.

8 Jāmbhojī is often considered to be one of Rajasthan's earliest Sants. Maheshwari even considers Jāmbhojī to be the "starting point of the Sant poetry in Rajasthan" (Maheshwari 1980: 21). Though this claim is debatable, it testifies to the great significance of the Biśnoī Sampradāya among Rajasthan's Sant traditions.

9 Yogitā 2016 regards the Vedic character of the Biśnoī Sampradāya and seeks to find parallels between Vedic literature and Jāmbhojī's *vāṇī*. In another vein, Khāṁ 2016 interprets the doctrine of the Biśnoī Sampradāya in relation to *Sanātan Dharm*, the conception of an "eternal" Hindu religion, as it was originally used by various nineteenth century Hindu reformist movements (see Gottschalk 2012). For more on modern (re)interpretations of Hinduism, see Halbfass 1988: 334 f.

10 Charges pressed by members of the Biśnoī Sampradāya against people, who hunt animals or cut down trees in Biśnoī areas, regularly catch the attention of the Indian public. The Bollywood actor Salman Khan was even sentenced to five years in prison for killing an Indian gazelle and a black buck (Jain 2011: 67 f.). For another example of the Biśnoī's environmental activism, see

Biśnoī Sampradāya adhere to the so-called 29 rules (*untīs dharm niyam*): a collection of rules on conduct, environmental ethics and religious practice.[11] The twenty-nine rules are often thought to be the name-giver of the community, comprising of the Rajasthani word *bīs* (twenty) and *noī* (nine).[12] The Biśnoī Sampradāya also maintains a rich literary tradition comprising over 400 works. Despite the evidence of a long lineage of poet-saints beginning with the founder Jāmbhojī, the manuscript tradition apparently developed in the mid eighteenth century only. The earliest known manuscript is dated to 1722.[13] Therefore, a long phase of oral transmission of the early Biśnoī compositions must be assumed.[14]

Among the poet-saints of the Biśnoī Sampradāya,Vīlhojī was a central figure. As in the case of other Biśnoī poet-saints—and in fact religious leaders throughout South Asia and beyond—the live and deeds of Vīlhojī are shrouded in layers of myths and legends. Information about Vīlhojī can be obtained mainly through the hagiographical writing of later Biśnoī authors, such as Surajanajī, Kesaujī and others.[15] In addition, there are said to exist letters of correspondence between Vīlhojī and the then kings of Jaisalmer and Bikaner on the issue of land grants.[16] According to tradition Vīlhojī—whose full name was

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e. g. Joshi's article in *The Hindu* (http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Buck-doesnt-stop-for-Bishnoi-community/article14508008.ece). For further research about nature conservation and environmental change in Rajasthan, see Gold and Gujar 2002.

11 There is a striking similarity between the twenty-nine rules of the Biśnoī Sampradāya and the "Hundred Good Deeds" (*So Kirīa*) of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī literature of the *ginān*s, both in style and content (see Moir and Shackle 1992: 62 f.). An almost identical list of rules also prevails in the Jasnāth Sampradāya, a neighboring religious community of the Biśnoīs. Their list contains 36 rules (see Khan 2003a: 218).

12 See Pārīk 2001: 57.

13 For further information about this collective manuscript or *guṭkā*, see Māheśvarī 1970a: 36.

14 The late beginning of the textual transmission of Biśnoī works is not unusual and can be seen in adjacent traditions as well. The earliest identified manuscript of the *ginān*s, for instance, stems from 1736 only (see Moir and Shackle 1992: 15 f.).

15 See Māheśvarī 1970b: 639. Of course, hagiographical writings do not provide biographical data, although the mythical and the historical should not be separated too strongly either. Hagiographies or sacred biographies portray the life of a poet-saint ideal-typically and provide information about the self-perception and positioning of a community during a particular historical period. For more details on the genre of hagiography in Indian religious traditions, see Callewaert and Snell 1994 as well as Mallison 2001a.

16 See Māheśvarī 1970b: 645. It is yet to be researched, whether these documents exist. To my best knowledge the earliest correspondence between the Biśnoī Sampradāya and the royalty of the neighboring kingdoms is a warrant (*parvānā*) issued by the king of Bikaner Māhārājā Anupasiṁhajī regarding a land grant and the ban of cutting green trees in Mukām, dated to 1695 (see Māheśvarī 1970a: 133).

Viṭhaladāsa—lived from 1526 until 1616.[17] Although he was still a contemporary of Jāmbhojī, he never met his predecessor. Hagiographies of Jāmbhojī recount that the poet-saint established three seats or *gaḍḍī*s before his death in 1536 and appointed three *mahants* to these seats from among his main followers. However, he also indicated the establishment of a fourth seat in a few years and left all necessary items for the coming *mahant* in a box. His successors were advised to pay attention to a man named Vīṭhala, who would be able to memorize and repeat Jāmbhojī's *sabada*s—the words containing his teaching—immediately after hearing them.

Meanwhile Vīlhojī lived in the village Revāṛī (in today's Haryana) in a family of carpenters (Suthārs). According to legend he went blind at the age of 4. Despite his disability he is said to have been a smart, sociable boy with a great talent for singing and memorizing. Later in his life Vīlhojī lived with a group of wandering Sadhus, in whose company he arrived at a small village near Nokhā. Supposedly, he there encountered the other three *mahant*s of the Biśnoī Sampradāya as they recited so-called *Sabadavāṇī*, the utterings or teaching of Jāmbhojī. Immediately upon hearing the words of Jāmbhojī, Vīlhojī was cured of his blindness and began reciting the *Sabadavāṇī* himself. Subsequently he was initiated into the *sampradāya* and appointed the *mahant* of the fourth seat of the Biśnoī Sampradāya, which later constituted the main seat of the tradition.[18]

Vīlhojī was a distinguished poet. Texts covering a wide range of topics and genres are ascribed to him. His works encompass *sākhī*s (rhyming couplets), religious songs (*harjas*), a series of *kathā*s or stories on various topics as well as other works.[19] Besides being a distinguished poet, Vīlhojī is revered by Biśnois for his role in organizing and institutionalizing the Biśnoī Sampradāya: he allegedly brought back many people into the *sampradāya*, who began to leave the tradition after Jāmbhojī's death; he established various religious fair (*melas*), built temples and (re)gained royal patronage. He died in the village Rāmṛāvās (near Piparcity/Jodhpur), where a small temple indicates the place he was buried.

17 For more details on the life of Vīlhojī as summarized from a number of different Biśnoī hagiographies, see Ācārya 2016: 485 ff. and Māheśvarī 1970b: 639 ff.

18 The fourth seat of the Biśnoī Sampradāya is situated in Mukām. It is also called *safed pauśāk*, because its ascetic residents only wear white clothes.

19 Vīlhojī is furthermore believed to be the compiler of the earliest manuscript of the *Sabadavāṇī* (see Biśnoī 2012: 176). To my best knowledge, there is no proof that such an early manuscript of the *Sabadavāṇī* ever existed.

3 The *Kathā Gyāncarī*

Among the corpus of Biśnoī literature the *Kathā Gyāncarī* holds a special place. It is considered to be the most important Biśnoī composition after the *Sabadavāṇī* and is revered as revelation.[20] Above all, the *Kathā Gyāncarī* stands out from the other Biśnoī writings with regard to its genre, content and structure.[21] The KG engages with the greatness of the deified guru and founder of the tradition Jāmbhojī. It furthermore reflects in great detail on the question what constitutes right and wrong behavior, leading a person either to heaven or to hell. The text consists of 132 verses and is subdivided into *dohā*s, rhyming couplets, and *caupāī*s, quatrains. Therein, the *dohā*s and *caupāī*s appear in a fixed sequence in the KG. The composition begins with an invocation of god and praises guru Jāmbhojī in 8 *dohā*s. Subsequently, the KG explores in detail one topic in a number of *caupāī*s,[22] which are followed by 5 *dohās* summarizing the content of the *caupāī*s. The employment of the *dohā* as a tool of repeating, summarizing and reinforcing a topic expounded in *caupāī*s is consistent with the function of the *dohā* in Sant teaching. As a condense verse form the *dohā* is intended for oral recitation and memorizing within the framework of Sant teaching and "serves to summarize, shift the perspective or state a general truth."[23] The structure of alternating *dohā*s and *caupāī*s is repeated until the end of the text, which closes with 3 *dohās*.

The *KG* appears in recent publications under the title *Vīlhojī kī vāṇī*,[24] suggesting a connection with the genre of Sant *vāṇī*s, the utterings of the Sants. However, it differs considerably from this genre. Sant *vāṇī*s often consist of either *sākhī*s[25] or *pad*s (lyrical songs), which are employed to "express the

20 See Biśnoī 1997: xv.

21 I will hereafter refer to the text as KG. All translations of the KG were done by the author of this paper. The translations are based on Biśnoī's edition *Vīlhojī kī vāṇī* (1997). Biśnoī's edition has been compiled from Paramānandajī Vaṇiyāla's *pothā*, a manuscript that is dated to 1761/1762 (Biśnoī 1997: 23). As in the case of Jāmbhojī's *Sabadavāṇī* the first manuscripts of Vīlhojī's works originated in the mid eighteenth century only. The earliest manuscript is dated to 1739 CE and currently stored at the seat in Rāmṛāvās (see Māheśvarī 1970a: 77). Further research will have to determine the content of these early manuscripts of Vīlhojī's works.

22 The number of *caupāī*s is not fixed and ranges from 14 to 34 *caupāī*s.

23 See Schomer 1987: 74. Hashimoto furthermore explains that the "*dohā* needs extremely concise expression and can express only quintessence of a thought, an elaborate expression in *dohā* is nearly impossible" (Hashimoto 2014: 164).

24 See e. g. Biśnoī 1997.

25 Derived from the Sanskrit word "sākṣin", the term *sākhī* literally means "testimony". It is used to refer to rhyming verses (usually couplets or *dohā*s), which are endowed with a particular authoritative status. As Schomer writes, "*sākhī* is the authoritative utterance that

spiritual experience and teaching of the Sants".[26] The KG in contrast contains a sequence of alternating *dohā*s—which may also be called *sākhī*s depending on the context—and *caupāī*s. Moreover, the KG does not relate the spiritual experience of Vīlhojī, but instead offers an elaboration on the issue of sin or merit and the consequences of one's own action after death.

Rather than conflating the KG with Vīlhojī's other works as his *vāṇī*, the KG could also be studied separately within the framework of the early modern Rajasthani literary genre *prabandha kāvya* or composite poem. This genre encompasses the sub-genres *ākhyān-kāvya, carita-kāvya* and *kathā-kāvya*.[27] In fact, the sequencing of *dohā*s and *caupāī*s that the KG displays, is a typical feature of *prabandha kāvya*s. At the same time, the KG cannot be neatly classified into the three sub-categories of this genre either. It can neither be classified as *ākhyān-kāvya*[28]—a story inspired by the epics or Purāṇas—, nor as a *carita-kāvya*—a hagiographical story—, nor is it a *kathā-kāvya*[29]—a story engaging with a particular event in the life of a saint, king or hero.[30] The KG presents its audience or readership what the name suggests: it provides knowledge ("*gyāna*") about how to behave correctly ("*carī*"[31]) in order to avoid punishment in hell. According to some scholars Vīlhojī started the Biśnoī tradition of writing *kathās* about knowledge or behavior and later poets followed his style.[32] In his analysis of genres of Biśnoī literature, Māheśvārī consequently adds *cari-kathā* as another sub-genre of *prabanda kāvya*.[33] In summary one can maintain that

testifies to this inner revelation [of the *satguru* or true teacher] and leads others towards it" (Schomer 1987: 83). See Horstmann 1992 for a further elaboration on the use and function of *sakhī*s on the example of the Dādūpanthī homiletic tradition.

26 Schomer 1987: 84.

27 *Prabandha kāvya* was a popular genre in Jain Apabraṁśa literature already (see Lal 1991: 3304 f.). The sub-genres that are attributed to *prabandha kāvya* vary in research literature (see Varmā 1985: 404). Although *prabandha kāvya*s are meant for performance, the contexts of the performance differ. For instance *ākhyān-kāvyas* were often sung in a religious context, e. g. during the night vigils (*jāgaraṇ*, see Maheshwari 1980: 92 f.). Vīlhojī's KG, in contrast, was—and still is—performed (sung or recited) mainly during the Biśnoīs religious fairs or *mela*s.

28 Fore more information on *ākhyān-kāvya* see Datta 1987: 123 and Maheshwari 1980: 92 ff.

29 See Datta 1987: 2012 for *kathā-kāvya* and 1989: 2007 for a general introduction into the genre of Rajasthani *kathā*, including the *carita-kāvya*.

30 Vīlhojī composed *prabanda kāvya*s of all three types. For instance, his *Kathā Jaisalmera kī* can be considered a *kathā-kāvya*, his *Kathā Autārapāta* a *carita-kāvya*. Only the KG deviates from the genre conventions. The term *kathā* is furthermore used in the Dādūpanth as an alternative name for homilies that are otherwise called *pravacan* (see Horstmann 1992: 37).

31 The Rajasthani word "cari" or "carita" denotes conduct, behavior.

32 One example is the *Dharamacarī* of Vīlhojī's successor Surajanajī, see Māheśvarī 1970b: 664 f.

33 Māheśvarī 1970b: 969.

the KG is a unique text within the Biśnoī Sampradāya with regard to its style and genre, being a *kathā* that deals with behavior and actions, and therefore deserves a special place among the corpus of Biśnoī literary works.

4 Depiction of Hell According to the *Kathā Gyāncarī*

The majority of the KG deals with hell or with sins that eventually lead a person into hell. After an invocation of guru Jāmbhojī as the *sadguru*—the true, deified teacher or the teacher within—and in fact as the tenth embodiment of lord Viṣṇu, the KG proceed with its main subject: the consequences of one's action after death. Although the KG also defines good actions or behavior, it mainly focuses on sins and their consequences after death. Out of its 132 verses, 40 verses of the KG deal with the vices and 53 verses deal with punishment in hell. Thus, approximately two thirds of the KG deal with hell in one way or the other. In comparison, only 24 verses regard good deeds, heaven or final liberation.

Although punishment in hell is a central topic of the KG, the term hell itself rarely appears in the text and only few verses refer to hell in generic terms.[34] One nevertheless knows that the portrayed suffering takes place in hell, since it is usually marked by the arrival of Yama.[35] Yama appears as a judge for the deceased and decides on their punishment, which is then carried out by his evil messengers. Furthermore, the KG offers precise descriptions of different hells and their distinct forms of torture. Sometimes, the specific hells are also named, such as the hell *Kuṁbhīpāka*. Apart from specific hells, hell is mostly referred to as suffering ("duṣa"), harm[36] or punishment ("ḍaṇḍo"). It is the place, where a person reaps the fruits of his own sins.[37]

The KG mentions a wide range of sins, which it categorizes as sins of the mind, speech and deed.[38] Among these sins are the drinking of unfiltered water, the consummation of opium or other intoxicants, the cutting of green trees,

34 In the few instances, where hell is named, it is denominated by the Rajasthani term "payāḷ" or "patāḷ/pāṭāḷ". In some cases hell is simply called "marata loka", the world of the dead. See, e. g. verse 67.

35 See, e. g. verse 39: "jama kāḷa pahuṁcai āya", Yama arrived.

36 See, e. g. verse 36: "jīva saheṁsī hāṇya", the soul will be harmed.

37 See, e. g. verse 33: "aisā phaḷa hoyā", this is the result.

38 Verse 17 of the KG addresses the 3 categories of sin: *Pāpa taṇāṁ chaṁ tīnya parakāra, manyasā vācā kramaī vikāra / Tyauha parakāra bandhai pāpa, jo bandhaṁ so bhūgate āpa //17//* "There are three kinds of sin: the corruption of mind, speech or deed / In this way one ties the

sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman, missing one's morning baths, but also anger, lying, gossiping and many more. Importantly, some of the sins the KG enumerates—e. g. the cutting green trees—have become religious tenets of the Biśnoī Sampradāya in the course of time and were later listed among the twenty-nine rules (*untīs dharm niyam*). Although the twenty-nine rules are often believed to have their origin in the teaching of Jāmbhojī, they are not mentioned in his *Sabadavāṇī*. In fact, the *Sabadavāṇī* offers very little practical advice for the devotees of Jāmbhojī and instead revolves around Jāmbhojī's claim to spiritual authority and superiority.[39] The KG, in contrast, offers for the first time tangible rules for the members of the Biśnoī Sampradāya in the form of either interdictions or precepts.[40] The KG could thus be considered as a starting point of a process of differentiating and refining the Biśnoī religious doctrine.

Verses 23 and 24 serve as an example of the ways, in which the KG describes sins. These two verses cover a variety of sins: from wrong states of mind (anger) to the worship of unworthy people—probably referring to any religious teacher outside of the Biśnoī Sampradāya—, to adultery. The result of these bad actions is apparent: a person, who commits these sins, will go to hell.

> Whose mind develops anger and dissent, who makes secret offering to unworthy people / Who does not take interest in the words of the teacher, the religious duty he performs are worthless //23//
>
> Who rejects salvations and the way of religious duty, and loves the wife of another man/ Who goes astray and feels lust for the wife of another man, for this person there is no hope for paradise //24//[41]

From verse 39 onwards Yama appears as the lord of the hells and a graphic description of the tortures awaiting the sinners follows.[42] The KG describes in great detail the different existing hells and the forms of torture carried out in them. Moreover, it connects the hellish torture to particular crimes or vices a person committed. In the KG the description of hell—usually written in *caupāī*s—follows a particular structure. At first the hell and the respective torture carried out by Yama's messengers is described. This form of torture lasts for a certain

sin (to oneself); who is thus tied, will himself suffer its results." However, in the enumeration of sins that follow this verse, the sins are not always classified according to the three categories.

39 See Kempe-Weber 2015.

40 To my best knowledge the KG is the first Biśnoī work that contains practical advice on the actions a Biśnoī should avoid or perform.

41 *Gāja vāja mana vagasīyai, rahaisyau dāna kupātāṁ dīyai / Gura kau kahyau nai āvai dāya, kīyau dharama biratho jāya //23// Melha mugati dharama kī rīti, paranārī suṁ maṇḍai prīti / Āpa bharāntī paratī pyāsa, minaṣā kisī bhisatī kī āsa //24//*

42 For more on the changing history and mythology of the figure Yama, see Merh 1996.

time. When the punishment is over, the body designed for torture in hell (*yātana deha*)[43] is restored again, much to the happiness of the deceased sinner. However, the sinner is not released from his suffering. Instead, he is sent to the next hell, where he has to endure many rounds of other unspeakable tortures. The next quotation serves as an example for the typical manner, in which suffering in hell is depicted in the KG. In this instance, the sinner has been transferred to the next round of torture. In this hell he is burnt to ashes as the punishment for adultery.

> Hair, skin, flesh and bones are burned until only the ornaments remain; but the soul is not released, it must endure great suffering/
> Yama drags him away and dismembers him; when the body cools down it recovers again //69//
>
> When it recovers, Yama comes closer again/
> "You loved the wife of another man; this behavior of yours was truly a vice, fool!" //70//
>
> He weeps for he cannot endure the pain inflicted by the fire/
> "You burned me numerous times, you tortured and killed me; have mercy upon me and release me" //71//
>
> "You will not be released for you committed great sins, by performing bad actions you tied the sins to you, you debauched person."
> The messenger ties him to a stake and tortures him. This is the result of adultery //72//[44]

When the punishment is finished, the sinner is thrown into the next hell, called the Forest of Sword Leaves, where he is cut into pieces by the leaves of a tree.[45] According to the KG, this is the punishment for cutting down green trees. As the example illustrated, the KG attempts to connect sins to specific forms of torture in hell. In this manner the text graphically depicts the suffering that awaits any person daring to commit sins. Generally, the KG places great emphasis on the negative results of one's own action after death.

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43 For an elaboration on the Hindu cosmography as depicted in epic-purāṇic texts and more specifically on the issue of the crossing of boundaries, which necessitates the acquisition of a specific body—such as when entering hell, see Malinar 2005.

44 *Baḷe, cāṁba hāḍa māsa saṅkalya rahai, jīva nai nikasai boha duṣa sahai / Ghīṁsyara nāgaṛa nāṁṣai para, lāgai pūṇa piṇḍa pāṅgarai //69// Pāṅgariyo sa līye jaba kāya, nāgaṛa vilagai āya / Paranārī sūṁ karatau moha, cāla kukaramī mesu tauha //70// Kuka kalaya pāyo jāya, agana dahai duṣa sahyau na jāya / Bāḷyaujāḷyau vinaṛi vigoya, dayā karau aba chāḍo moya //71// Chuṭai nahīṁ pāpa kīyā ghaṇāṁ, kari kukaramaiṁ bāndhyāṁ cīkaṇāṁ / Mārai dūta thaṁbha galya deha, kācha-lapaṭa kā avagaṇa eha //72//*

45 This hell is known as *asipatravaṇa* in the *Bhagavatapurāṇa* and other purānic texts. See Jacobsen 2009: 391.

Depictions of hell appear throughout the Indian religious history, starting with the Vedic period, and therein serve specific narrative, social, economic or devotional functions.[46] In earlier texts of Hindu traditions, hell entails quasi-eternal damnation. According to Tiefenauer's analysis, the accommodation of the idea of transmigration and *karma*[47] with the existence of hell(s) is only fully accomplished in the *Purāṇas*, especially in the so-called great *Purāṇas*, such as the *Varāhapurāṇa*.[48] Tiefenauer calls the process of accommodating these two seemingly incompatible ideas—transmigration/*karma* and hell—"a veritable *tour de force*"[49] and "une véritable quadrature du cercle: enchâsser le monde des morts, se lieu autrefois stable et définitif, dans une *saṁsāra* cyclique où règne l'impermanence".[50] Once hell is adjusted to the concepts of transmigration and *karma*, suffering in hell is relegated to a rather short time, in which the departed use their *karma*—for instance in one of the hells—, before they are reborn again.[51] The threat of hell, however, continued to be potent and was utilized to highlight the goal: the easily available avoidance of hell and, moreover, the liberation from the cycle of rebirths through devotion to god. Interestingly, in early modern Sant traditions hell—and heaven—ceases to be a central concept at all, poignantly called by Tiefenauer "la fin de la fin".[52] The great significance that is ascribed to hell in Vīlhojī's KG is, thus, exceptional for two reasons. Since the Biśnoī doctrine embraces the theory of *karma*, condemnation to hell should be short-lived and as a text of a Sant tradition, the KG should not place such great significance to hell in any way.

In the KG, the sinner's stay in hell is greatly emphasized and larded with details of horrible suffering. Moreover, a reference to a possible end of suffering

46 See Jacobsen 2009 for the narrative, social and economic function of hell according to three categories of Hindu texts (the epics, the *Dharmasūtra*s or *Dharmaśāstra*s, the *Purāṇa*s) and Tiefenauer for the devotional function of hell according to the great *Purāṇa*s in which hell is used to highlight the soteriological role of the worshipped god (Tiefenauer 2017: 395–458).

47 A complex philosophical conception underlies the theory of *karma*, which cannot be dealt with in detail in the context of this paper. For more, see Krishan 1997.

48 See Tiefenauer 2017: xxxix and 235 ff. Already Buddhist and Jain texts attempted to coordinate the concepts of transmigration and *karma* with punishment in hell (Tiefenauer 2017: 142 f.).

49 Tiefenauer 2017: xxx.

50 Tiefenauer 2017: 142.

51 On the time spent in hell Zoller explicates the following: "during the ten months after death and before birth the departed spirit and the embryo both have to suffer hunger and deprivation, both have to cross a river full of garbage, and both have to traverse various hells" (Zoller 1999: 21.).

52 Tiefenauer 2017: 459 f.

and the eventual rebirth of the sinner is virtually absent from the KG.[53] The KG maintains that punishment in hell lasts uncountable times ("vāra ananta", e. g. verse 73), lasts for endless eras ("juga juganantara", verse 79), is as endless as the sea ("sāgara jāhi", verse 89) and offers no release, ("nahiṁ chūṭai", e. g. verse 64). It thus creates the impression that condemnation to hell is the "eternal" consequence of one's sinful action.[54]

Following the explanation about the different types of sins and their respective consequences in hell, the text shifts to the depiction of heaven. The last third of the text engages with virtues and the positive results a person reaps as he enters heaven. Heaven is mostly called "svarga" in the KG, but is sometimes also designated as "bhisati" (literally paradise, derived from the persio-arabic term *beheśt*). Frequently, the term "Vaikuṇṭha"—Viṣṇu's heaven—appears in the KG as well. The structure of the heaven-section equals the hell-section. *Caupāī*s describe in detail the good deeds that result in a person's transferal to heaven after death. *Dohā*s then underline and summarize the thoughts formulated in the *caupāī*s. The expounding of virtue and heaven even ends with the same type of sentence as the section on hell.[55] Verses that mention heaven and verses about final release alternate in the KG.

Just as in the case of hell, heaven is not depicted as an intermediate step and no rebirth is mentioned, once the good *karma* is fully used. Rather, the KG maintains that good Biśnoīs climb Viṣṇu's chariot, which brings them the thirty-tree crores gods.[56] Here, they experience everlasting, utter happiness from which they will not return to experience another rebirth.[57] The KG explicitly states that a person, who adheres to the Biśnoī doctrines, crosses over and resides in heaven ("pāra girāe vāsa lahisyaiṁ", verse 119) or is granted final liberation ("mugati gayā", verse 103). The conception of hell as eternal punishment for a sinner is thus mirrored on a structural level of the KG by a description of liberation, which leads to an eternal residence in heaven.

53 Only one verse of the KG hints at an eventual rebirth of a sinner, verse 27. It states that a person, who eats meat, will not go to heaven, but will be reborn as a pig.

54 The depiction of hell as eternal punishment represents a significant difference to the *Sabadavāṇī*. In the *Sabadavāṇī* suffering mainly consists in the endless cycle of rebirths, from which a person may be released, if he obtains the grace of the *sadguru* Jāmbhojī. The composition also mentions the existence of heaven and hell, but gives little meaning to them. Rather than punishment in hell, it shows rebirth into a lower existence as the consequences of bad deeds.

55 See verse 93 and 128 of the KG respectively.

56 See verse 115 and 117 for a mention of the ride in Viṣṇu's chariot to heaven.

57 See, e. g. verse 125: *tou suṣāṁ nai avai anta* ("this happiness has no end").

The following verse illustrates that the reward for following the Biśnoī tenets, as established in the KG, can be final liberation.[58]

> Quietly endure insolent words and remain humble, forgive the worldly mistakes you hear /
> If you do good to those who do wrong, you will surely cross the ocean of existence //98//[59]

One can thus deduce that the KG does not depict heaven as a stopover that lasts until the good *karma* is used, but as the final abode a virtuous person enters upon the release from the cycle of rebirths. Similar to the concept on final liberation in other monotheistic *bhakti* traditions, such as the ones founded by Madhva or Vallabha, the KG proclaims that a person enters the eternal abode of the worshipped God after being liberated.[60] As Nelson explicates, the *jīvā*s (spiritual selves) are not disembodied, but endowed with a "spiritual body" that allows them to enjoy a stay in a heaven, often called *Vaikuṇṭha* or *Goloka*.[61] According to my analysis the structural parallelism that the KG employs, suggests that condemnation to hell is the opposite of the final release from the cycle of rebirths. Jacobsen argues in his analysis of the functions of hell in various Hindu text traditions that "hell functions in binary opposition to heaven, *svarga*, but hell is not in binary opposition to the highest salvic goal".[62] Nevertheless, it must be noted that the KG employs this very binary opposition of hell and final release. In doing so, the KG greatly emphasizes the function of hell as a place for anyone deviating from the Biśnoī doctrine.

58 As other verses of the KG state, liberation is also highly dependent upon the *guru*'s mercy.
59 *Ajara jarai boha nuṁvaṇī nuṁvauṁ, saṁbhalya dosa dunī kā ṣuṁvau / Ogaṇa kīye je guṇa karai, bhavasāgara teṁ dutara taraiṁ //98//*
60 In the Puṣṭi Mārga, a religious community that was founded by the sixteenth century philosopher Vallabha, the souls are not liberated, but rather "lifted" (*uddhāra*) from their ignorance about the unreal nature of *saṁsāra*, the cycle of rebirths. With the grace of lord Kṛṣṇa (*anugraha*) and according to his wish (*icchā*) a soul reaches the eternal world of delight in *Goloka* (see Barz 1992: 70). The reward of having obtained Kṛṣṇa's grace can occur threefold: "either eternal experience of the *līlā*s of Shrī Kṛṣṇa in Goloka as a *sakhā* of Shrī Kṛṣṇa, or union into the divine being of Shrī Kṛṣṇa in Goloka to be manifested by him in his *līlā*, or the ability to be a non-human or inanimate entity or a non-participating human being in Goloka and so to witness the eternal *līlā*" (Barz 1992: 92f.). For more information on the Puṣṭi Mārga, see also Saha 2006.
61 Within the numerous textual traditions of Hinduism there is a wide range of different conceptions of final liberation or *mokṣa*, that this paper cannot deal with in detail. According to some texts, a liberated soul can still have an embodiment. According to others, this is not possible. For a summary of the varying conceptions of *mokṣā*, see Nelson 2010.
62 Jacobsen 2009: 386.

5 Eternal Suffering as a Rhetorical Strategy

As the previous section attempted to demonstrate, the tortures of hell know no end in the KG. In the following, I will argue that this depiction of hell provides a rhetorical strategy that is used to emphasize the teacher's or *guru*'s authority and reinforces the Biśnoī doctrine in a time of need. In order to understand the rhetorical strategy that underlies the depiction of hell as eternal suffering, it is crucial to analyze the role and function of the teacher or *guru* in the KG. According to the KG the worst crime a person can commit, is following the wrong teacher or not listening to the teacher's advice. In this context, the KG uses two terms for teacher: *guru* and *sadguru*. According to my analysis, the term *guru* relates to a living guru—probably referring to Vīlhojī himself—, while the true or defied teacher (*sadguru*) is used as a title for Jāmbhojī. Both, the *sadguru* and the *guru* play central roles in the KG.

Revering the *sadguru* Jāmbhojī[63] is one of the pillars of the Biśnoī doctrine according to the KG. The subsequent verses refer to the divine status of Jāmbhojī as the *sadguru* and embodiment of Viṣṇū. The verses stem from the invocation of guru Jāmbhojī at the beginning of the KG. Verses 11 and 12 recount that Jāmbhojī has come down to earth as Viṣṇu's tenth embodiment to help the people.[64] In verse 13 the emphasis shifts to the teacher's role in determining vice and virtue, and his role in enabling his devotees to become liberated from the cycle of rebirths.

> He came for the sake of the devotees, into the country of thorns of the division India/
> He rested his sleeping mat at Saṁbharathaḷa, he irradiated the nine divisions of the world with his light //11//
>
> He approved the six *darśaṇas*; men and gods remember him for the sake of welfare/
> He felt no hunger or thirst, nor did he sleep; his light appeared entirely by itself //12//
>
> Mind the advice of such a good teacher, which determines what vice and virtue are/
> His mantra does not bring forth self-conceit or pride, hearing it takes care of the issue of birth and death //13//[65]

63 Gold maintains that when Sant lineages form, the term *sadguru* begins to relate to a human being (the Sant), from whom the successors then derive their authoritative status (Gold 1987: 306 f.).

64 The claim that Jāmbhojī is Kalkin or the tenth *avatāra* of Viṣṇu is a prominent motif in the Nizārī Ismā'īlī literature of South Asia, such as the *gināns* (see Mallison 1991 and Mallison 2001b). The same claim also permeates Jāmbhojī's *Sabadavāṇī*. See Kempe-Weber 2015.

65 *Bhagatāṁ kājya kīyau paravesa, bharatha khaṇḍa maṁhi bāgaṛa desa / Saṁbharathaḷi ubhau sātharī, navaṣaṇḍi joti jugati paricarī //11// Tīhaṁ nai mānai chava darasaṇāṁ, hita kari suranara sīṁvarai ghaṇāṁ / Ṣudhyā tīsanāṁ nīnda nai vyāpai, joti sarūpī āyo āpai //12//*

The KG thus exposes that Jāmbhojī has the power to uplift his believers and grant them liberation, provided they accept the Biśnoī doctrine and follow him, the right teacher.

The necessity of the living *guru*'s teaching is also greatly emphasized in the KG. Without listening to the teacher's words, people will necessarily end up in hell—for they cannot know what sin and virtue are. Even if by chance a person manages to live without committing sins, this alone will not yield positive fruits. Only by the *guru*'s and lord Jāmbhojī's grace[66] a person can cross over the ocean of existence and become liberated. The next four verses are exemplary for the ways in which the teacher's role in determining vice and virtue is constructed. His words teach the devotees what sin or virtue is and keep them on the right path. The devotees are therefore at the guru's mercy in avoiding hell.

> You will go to hell and suffer pain, therefore do not attach your mind to illusion/
> Remember the words of the teacher, give importance to good actions //35//
>
> Man, remember your death! This world age is but a dream /
> Certainly, if you do not take care, your soul will be harmed //36//
>
> Creature, free yourself from sin and understand this! Focus on virtue/
> There will be a lot of suffering without his love, therefore do not reject the teacher //37//
>
> What the teacher says, you should accept and keep in your mind/
> Watch out, creature, for the signs of the wrong path //38//[67]

The following quotation is a key verse in the KG. It portrays the moment a deceased sinner realizes the scale of his sin and understands that he will be tortured by Yama and his messengers for endless eras. Importantly, the great sin this person has committed, is not following the teaching of his guru.

> I did not accept what the teacher told me; truly my sin is as heavy as a mountain //91//[68]

Sāṁbhaḷi sugara taṇāṁ upadesa, pāpa dharama kā kaha navesa / Mantra abhimāna na āṇai grava, opati ṣapati saṁbhāḷai srava //13//

66 As Gold explicates a living *guru* is perceived as being imbibed with the divine *sadguru* and the living guru can, therefore, "deliver grace and power through his own person" (Gold 1987: 310).

67 *Dorai jāya sa duṣa sahisai, māyā man nai lagāya / Gura kau sabada citāri kari, karaṇī ādari kāya //35// Mānavī maraṇa saṁbhālya re, juga sapanantara jāṇya / Nihacai niravāho nahīṁ, jīva saheṁsī hāṇya //36// Parahari prāṇī pāpa budhya, dharamaiṁ taṇo parasāya / Jaiha raṅga viṇa duṣa ghaṇauṁ, gura varajantā na jāya //37// Jo gura kahyau sa manya kari, melhau manya āpāṇa / Jīvaṛā kari saṁbhaḷī, agati tanāṁ ihanāṇa // 38//*

68 *Gura kau kahyau na mānyau sahī, pāpa pahāra asīmāṁ sahī //91//*

Verse 91 is also interesting because it contains a break in the metre. The verse is neither a *dohā* nor a *caupāī*, but a single line. This caesura marks a shift in the subject, as the KG engages with good actions and their results in heaven in the remaining third of the text. Verse 91 summarizes the essences of everything said in the first two thirds of text. Breaking with the meter, this line surely caught the attention of the audience and directed it to the content: One should not reject the teacher or one will be tortured in hell forever.

What could have been possible grounds for Vīlhojī to employ this rhetorical strategy and formulate such strong threats of eternal punishments in hell? Why was it necessary to forcefully remind the audience or readership of the significance and authority of the *guru*? A closer look at the development of the *sampradāya* at Vīlhojī's time can shed some light on these questions. The necessity to urge people to remain members of the Biśnoī Sampradāya also finds expression in Vīlhojī's hagiographies. According to various sources, Vīlhojī entered the Biśnoī Sampradāya at a time of intense difficulty.[69] The tradition was now—only one generation after Jāmbhojī—in a state of decline. People started to leave the Biśnoī Sampradāya or began to adhere to other religious practices and doctrines alongside the Biśnoī doctrine, thereby corrupting the tradition. Moreover, wrong teachers began to teach a distorted Biśnoī doctrine.[70] Vīlhojī allegedly took care of all of these issues. Next to regaining and increasing the followership of the Biśnoī Sampradāya, Vīlhojī also played a pivotal role in the institutionalization of the tradition. For instance, the establishment of religious fairs or *melas* in the region as well as the building of several temples is ascribed to him.[71]

Furthermore, he is said to have (re)gained royal patronage. Allegedly, he received two land grants from the kings of Bikaner and Jaisalmer and he relied on royal support in his task of bringing the Biśnoī Sampradāya back to life. Interestingly enough, in connection with the royal patronage of Jodhpur's king

69 Based on various hagiographic sources Māheśvārī concludes that "before Vīlhojī became initiated, the foundation of the *sampradāya* had begun to tremble" (Māheśvarī 1970b: 643; translated by the author of the paper).

70 Māheśvārī recounts the tale of the wrong teacher Ajñāno—a Biśnoī teacher, but also a left-handed tantric. According to legend Vīlhojī advised him and brought him on back onto the right path of the Biśnoī Sampradāya. His resting place or *samādhī* as well as a small temple is today in the village Samela (see Māheśvarī 1970b: 644 f.). For a further elaboration on the enmity towards tantric practitioners ("*śāktas*") expressed in the compositions of various *bhakti* traditions, see Pauwels 2010.

71 The establishment of religious fairs, but also the consolidation of the teaching lineages as well as the building of monasteries and temples can be typical elements in the institutionalization of *sampradāya*s. See Malinar 2011.

Rājā Sūrasiṁhajī, Vīlhojī demanded the king's help in teaching and punishing his followers. Vīlhojī allegedly perceived a need to threaten the aberrant Biśnoīs, for his advice was not enough to bring them back onto the right path.[72] Whatever may be the historical truth behind these hagiographical stories, it is evident that the KG and Vīlhojī's sacred biographies voice the same need to keep the Biśnoīs within the fold and to remind them of the *guru*'s rightful authority.

6 Nizārī Ismā'īlī Influence on the Biśnoī Sampradāya

Another approach in exploring Vīlhojī's reasons for depicting hell as eternal punishment is provided by Biśnoī Sampradāya's connection to Nizārī Ismā'īlism. The religious literature of the Biśnoīs and particularly Jāmbhojī's *Sabadavāṇī* abound with references and motifs that suggest a close connection to Nizārī Ismā'īlism. One way to explain the KG's depiction of hell is to refer to the different role that hell plays in Islamic traditions, such as Nizārī Ismā'īlism. Nizārī Ismā'īlism is a sub-division of the 7er Shi'a branch of Islam, which disseminated on the South Asian subcontinent since the thirteenth century latest. Here, it acculturated strongly to the Indian religious environment by adopting literary modes, motifs and religious concepts of already established traditions. Apparently, the acculturation helped the Nizārīs to escape persecution by Sunni rulers[73] and also served as a strategy of conversion.[74] While keeping *taqiyya*—or precautionary dissimulation—the Nizārīs often appeared indistinguishable from *bhakti sampradāya*s, Sufi orders or even yogic traditions with regard to their outward appearance as well as their songs and teachings. For instance, the Hindu concept of *avatāra* was used to explain the imamate, which occupies a central place in Nizārī theology. In this context lord Viṣnū refers to the Ismā'īlī imāms in general, while Viṣṇu's last embodiment Kalkin refers to 'Āli as the first imām and in an extension to the present imāms.[75]

72 "Seeing Biśnoīs everywhere in Marwar corrupting the tradition, Vīlhojī recognized the necessity to threaten them also to a certain extent, for simply by explaining to them they would not understand" (Māheśvarī 1970b: 645; translated by the authors of the paper). Another version of the story is told in a recent hagiography by Ācārya 2016: 486 f.

73 See Virani 2011.

74 See Khan 2003b for the Nizārī's unique method of attracting followers in South Asia.

75 See Asani 2002: 36.

One must note that the role and authority of the imām and the pīr—the missionary or local representative of the imām—of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs is very similar to the role of the *guru* and *sadguru* described in the KG. Interestingly enough, the term *sadguru*—the title of Jāmbhojī—was used by the Indian Nizārī Ismā'īlīs as a code word for their imām or pīr. Both imām and pīr act as religious guides for the members of their community. The role of the imām's representative, the pīr, is explicated by Moir and Shackle in the following way:

> It is as the Imam's ordained representative that the Pir is vested with total authority over all believers comprising the congregation of the community. No figure is more prominent in the ginans than the Guide (Sk *gur* = Pers *pir*). He is also called the True Guide (Sk *sat-gur*), since the message he conveys, the Word of the Guide (Sk *gur-vacan, gur-sabad*), alone opens the way to salvation.[76]

The particular authority of the imām to advice the community stems from his divine status as the spiritual successor of prophet Muhammad. Fulfilling his specific soteriological role, the imām will furthermore deliver those who obeyed him at the end of each time cycle. In the context of Indian Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm, the imām is often equated with the tenth embodiment of lord Vishnu, Kalkin and called *nikalanka* or *nakalanka* ("the immaculate one, the stainless one").

Just like the *Sabadavāṇī*, the KG contains various Nizārī Ismā'īlī motifs, references or metaphors. For example, the KG depicts Jāmbhojī as Viṣṇu's tenth embodiment Kalkin and savior of the 33 crores souls left on earth—a prominent motif of the *ginān*s, the religious literature of the Khojā Ismā'īlīs.[77] Jāmbhojī is furthermore addressed in the KG with the typical Nizārī term *nikalanka*, which is an epithet for the imām.[78] This claim to imāmship by a teacher of a local seat would be highly unusual in the context of the *ginānic* literature. However, it does occur in traditions, which have broken with the main *da'wa* in Gujarat and established their own seats, as it might have also been the case for the Biśnoīs.[79] Especially verses 99–110 of the KG abound with these Nizārī

76 Moir and Shackle 1992: 21.

77 For an elaboration of the Khojā Ismā'īlī *ginān*s, see Mallison 1992 and Mallison 2001b.

78 See, e. g. verse 103 of the KG. The Nizārī figure *nikalanka* also occurs in the religious hymns (*Āgam*s) of the untouchable Tantric community of the Mahāmārgīs of Gujarat, although the texts place further emphasis on *nikalanka's* abolishment of untouchability at the end of *kaliyuga*. The prevalence of the figure *nikalanka* suggests a close connection of the Mahāmārgīs with Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm or even a Nizārī provenance of the community. See Mallison 2009.

79 One finds this claim to imāmship, for instance, in the literature of the Imāmśāhīs, which dissevered from the main branch in Gujarat and established a separate seat in Pirana. See Khan 2003a: 43.

references. Therein, verse 99 contains an interesting reference to the practice of paying a tithe to the living imam, called *dassondh*[80] in South Asia.[81]

> If a man honors truth, if he bows to the guru and pays the tithe /
> If through the practice of yoga he fosters mercy, he will surely receive a pure body one day //99//[82]

In the following verses (100–110) Jāmbhojī is identified with the *avatāra*s of Viṣṇū in the previous eras: in Satyayuga, in Tretayuga, in Dvāparayuga and finally in Kaliyuga. Besides being a prominent motif known e. g. from the *ginānic* literature, these verse are significant for another reasons. After identifying Jāmbhojī as the savior of the remaining souls in Kaliyuga, the KG again shifts to the theme of sins and their consequences after death. Interestingly enough, in this section, Yama no longer appears as the lord of the underworld or the judge, taking account of a person's good and bad deeds, but Satan. It is Satan that awaits them at the shores of the ocean of existence and takes them to hell.[83] One can thus wonder, if there is an Islamic conception underlying the notion of eternal punishment in hell in KG.

The question, whether there is a specific function of hell in the Indian Nizārī Ismā'īlī traditions, yet has to be researched. As it seems, hell is not among the central topics of the *ginān*s, which place greater emphasis on the cyclicity of time and especially on the cyclic appearance of the imām (as the living, the future imām or as his ultimate manifestation),[84] often explained with the Hindu concept of *avatāra* or embodiment as well as the idea of rebirth.[85] However, in Islamic traditions in general, one can find a depiction of hell as eternal punishment that is similar to the depiction of hell in the KG. In Islamic traditions, all foremost in the Qur'ān, hell is called *Jahannam* or *al-nār*, referring to its most

80 For more on the Nizārī Ismā'īlī system of paying tithe, see Daftary 2012: 167. Of course, the paying of a tithe also occurs in other Sant traditions and is by no means constrained to Ismā'īlīsm. However, since the reference occurs among other Nizārī motifs, it could be considered a reference to Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm.

81 Compare *ginān Janat-puri*, verse 17: "Offer the tithe and believe in him, for he is the manifestation of Ali. Those who stray from him will not attain the gates of heaven." (*eji dejo dasond ne manajo, ane e che ali avatār; e thaki je bhulaśe, te nahiṁ pāmaśe sarag duār*). See Shackle and Moir 1992: 138 f.

82 *Je nara huvai hakīkatha māṁya, dasavandha ṣaracai gura ke nāṁya / Joga jugati sūṁ pāḷai dayā, tāmhanai nihacai vāsare niramaḷa kayā //99//*

83 See verse 113 and following verses.

84 On the soteriological role of the imām, see Daftary 2012: 160 f.

85 For an elaborate analysis of cyclicity in Ismā'īlīsm, see Corbin 1983.

characteristic feature and main form of torture: fire.[86] In hell sinners receive various punishments on a physical and mental level, from which they will never be released. People are punished for their failure to belief in God, but also for committing specific crimes.[87] In the Qur'ān the description of hell is mirrored by a description of heaven as hell's opposite. Importantly, hell "is an eternal punishment, for the Lord will not allow them ever to die."[88] According to Thomassen's analysis on the conception of hell in Islam, hell fulfills an important function. It threatens people with eternal punishment in hell, if they don't adhere to the tenets of Islam. Thomassen thus regards the hell-threat as a "rhetorical amplifier",[89] which serves to reinforce the authority and prophetic message of the prophet Muhammad. As shown in the previous section, the KG also threatens people with eternal condemnation to hell, should they deviate from the Biśnoī doctrine or reject the authority of the *guru*. This depiction of hell in the KG certainly amplifies on a rhetorical level the religious teaching the KG imparts and the singularity and authority of Vīlhojī and Jāmbhojī. The particular significance of the teacher, the various Nizārī references as well as the centrality of hell as a "rhetorical" amplifier for the religious doctrine of the Biśnoīs can be interpreted as an indication for the close connection of the Biśnoī Sampradāya and Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm.

7 Conclusion

This paper attempted to demonstrate that the KG depicts hell as an eternal punishment both on a structural level as well as on the level of content. The KG does not represent hell as a mere stopover before a following rebirth, however agonizing this stopover may be. Instead it characterizes the tortures of hell as lasting eternally without offering any release. On a structural level the KG employs a parallelism between hell and the final abode in heaven, which can only be reached after the liberation from the cycle of rebirths.

As my analysis further illustrated there can be two possible grounds for depicting hell in this manner. One can be found in Vīlhojī's role in the

86 For an elaboration of the conception of hell according to the Qur'ān, see Gwynne 2002.
87 There are different theological conceptions within the various Islamic traditions regarding the eternal nature of hell and the question what crimes incur hell. See Thomassen 2009: 410 f.
88 Thomassen 2009: 404. In Islamic literature the opposite movement also existed. The notion of a temporary hellfire, for example, served an important function in the creation of a distinct Sunni identity. See Hamza 2016 for more on this issue.
89 Thomassen 2009: 405.

development of the Biśnoī Sampradāya, as it faced a time of intense difficulties and challenges. In this regard the hell threats in the KG are a rhetorical strategy employed to warn people of the dire consequence should they leave or corrupt the tradition. It highlights the importance of remaining "good" members of the tradition and of accepting the authority of the teacher—be it the divine *sadguru* Jāmbhojī or the living *guru* Vīlhojī. A further reason for depicting hell as eternal suffering could lie in the Biśnoī Sampradāya's connection to Nizārī Ismā'īlīsm. Seen from this perspective, hell in the KG fulfills a function that is in compliance with the conception of hell in Islam as the everlasting punishment of disbelievers and sinners. The KG's particular emphasis on the *guru* and *sadguru* in their soteriological role, but also in their (divine) authority to guide their community of followers can be compared with the function and authority of the imām and the pīr, as depicted e. g. in the Nizārī Ismā'īlī literature of the *ginān*s.

Whatever may have been the case, the KG expresses an acute need to emphasize the singularity and supremacy of Jāmbhojī, as the divine *sadguru* and founder of a continuing lineage of Sants, and the authority of Vīlhojī in formulating religious tenets that members of the Biśnoī Sampradāya must adhere to at all costs. If one takes into consideration the performative background of the KG, its depiction of hell must have had a strong effect on the audience of the KG. Just as Vīlhojī's other *kathā*s the KG is sung mainly during the religious fairs (*mela*s), which today attract large audiences of lay followers of the Biśnoī Sampradāya. One can hardly imagine what the effect of the performance of the KG must have been, as it recounts the tortures of hell in graphic detail and offers only one way to avoid hell: minding the teacher's words and being a good Biśnoī. As verse 93 of the KG states and summarizes, there will be unspeakable torture for those who do not follow the right teacher.

> There exist many kinds of suffering, which I cannot describe /
> For him who forgets the topic of suffering and deviates from the virtuous conduct taught by the teacher //93//[90]

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90 *Valya anerā duṣa chai, kaiṁhaito na lahuṁ pāra / Bhoga visyai bhūlā bhuvaiṁ, je melhyau gura ācāra //93//*

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